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ABSTRACT

A national study of methods and materials used in teaching reading by adult education teachers was conducted. The purposes of the study were: to determine from ABE, GED, and ESL teachers the most popular methods, materials, and techniques currently in use for reading instruction in adult education; to determine the "goodness of fit" between the difficulty of the materials in use and the reading levels of the students being taught; to determine the reliability ratings of materials used for reading instruction; to determine what kinds of supplementary materials are used to augment direct reading instruction; to determine the teachers' beliefs as to why it is important for adult students to learn to read or to read better; and to determine what books the teachers believe every adult in their class should read. Responses obtained from a questionnaire completed by 240 adult education classroom teachers (176 of which were analyzable) in 43 states provided the data for the study. Conclusions based on the results of the data analysis are: (1) there is no suggestion in this study that any single publisher or any particular material type used for adult basic reading has control of even a minor proportion of the market; (2) several factors suggest that the quality of reading instruction may be lower than optimum; and (3) ABE teachers may not be motivating their students to read. (DB)

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A STUDY OF READING METHODS AND MATERIALS USED IN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

by

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Introduction: Since 1966 increasing numbers of teachers of Adult Basic Education classes have been involved in pre-service and in-service training programs funded by U.S.O.E.. Thus far over 9,000 teachers have received training through this effort. Experiences of teacher-trainers conducting training programs have indicated an extremely wide range of background, sophistication, philosophy and expertise among adult basic education teachers. This is particularly true in the area of teaching reading. Although in most cases the new teacher in the Adult Basic Education class brings no specific training or experience in the teaching of reading, the adult students he is most likely to be teaching will have deficits in their reading skills and must be taught something about reading in order to be successful in their educational program.

A review of the research in the field did not yield much useful information concerning the most popular methods and material used in teaching reading to adults in the classroom. Such information is considered important for teacher-trainers to have because it would enable the trainers to adjust the focus of training programs more precisely to the level of sophistication of the teachers receiving instruction in the teaching of reading.

It was for this reason that the broad based national study of methods and materials used in teaching reading by adult education teachers was conducted.

PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

The purposes of the study were:

1. To determine from the responses of ABE, GED and ESL teachers the most popular methods, materials and techniques currently in use by teachers for reading instruction in adult education classrooms.

2. To determine from the responses of teachers whether the materials they report using for reading instruction are generally suitable for the levels of reading of the students they are teaching; that is, to determine the "goodness of fit" between the difficulty of the materials in use and the reading levels of the students being taught.

3. To determine from the responses of teachers the reliability ratings of materials they report using for reading instruction; in a sense, an attempt to assess quality of instructional material in use.

4. To determine from the responses of teachers what kinds of supplementary materials are in use to augment direct reading instruction; this would include teacher-made materials and adaptations of materials of all types.

5. To determine the beliefs teachers report about why it is important for their adult students to learn to read (or to learn to read better).

6. To determine from the responses of teachers the titles of books (if any) they believe every adult in their class should read.

METHOD

The technique used in this study was an open-end questionnaire. Although this caused difficulty in data analysis, it did provide an "openness" which gave an indication of the diversity in the field. Prior to administration the survey was field tested in Kansas City and St. Louis, Missouri.

The Sample - The population from which this sample of respondents was drawn was full and part-time teachers of ABE, GED and ESL classes, most of whom are directly or indirectly under the jurisdiction of the State Director of Adult Education. It was not possible to select a random sample from the population indicated. However, a representative sample of the population was selected as described below.

During the summer of 1970, an Adult Basic Education Reading Institute was held on the campus of the University of Missouri - Kansas City. Forty-nine participants representing thirty-seven states attended the five-week Institute. In January of 1971 a follow-up Institute was held during which the original participants returned to the campus. At that time each participant was asked to take a quantity of questionnaires back to his home state so that responses could be obtained from fellow teachers working in adult education classes. Also, the Institute instructors requested program directors in states not represented in the Institute population to have adult education teachers in their program fill out the questionnaire. In this manner responses from 240 adult education classroom teachers were obtained, of which 176 contained information which was analyzable. Responses were thus obtained from teachers in 43 states representing all U.S.O.E. Regions.

RESULTS:

The Sample - The following represents further information on the characteristics of the sample population upon which the findings of this study are based.

EMPLOYMENT	NUMBER	PERCENT
Full Time ABE Teacher	36	21.5
Part Time ABE Teacher	133	78.5

READING LEVELS TAUGHT BY RESPONDENTS

Level	Reading Grade	Number
I	1-3	104
II	4-6	136
III	7-8	115
GED	above 8	81

The overlap in levels taught is due to the fact that adult students of various reading levels are grouped in classes together, or beacuse the respondents teach several different classes at different reading levels.

POPULATION OF RESPONDENTS' TEACHING LOCATIONS

Population of Community	Number	Percent
0-10,000	35	21
10,000-25,000	15	19
25,000-50,000	20	12
50,000-100,000	27	16
over 100,000	69	42

COMMUNITY TYPE

Type	Number	Percent
Rural	36	21
Urban	132	77
Both	3	2

ABE TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Years	Number	Percent
0-1	13	8
1-2	27	16
2-3	28	16
3-4	30	17
4-5	22	13
5-6	18	10
6-7	19	11
over 7	15	9
	172	

Examination of the data based on the characteristics of the respondents of this survey does not indicate unusual distortion of the expected characteristics of the population from which this sample was drawn. Concentration of respondents in the "100,000 or over" and "urban" community type probably is indicative of the fact that there are more programs in adult education in communities of this size than in any other of the categories listed. Teaching experience in adult education is heavily loaded between two and seven years,

probably corresponding to the number of years teaching opportunities in most ABE programs have been available.

Instructional Materials:

A general comment should be made at this point regarding the responses to the questionnaire designed to yield specific information concerning methods, materials and techniques used in the teaching of reading in the adult education classroom. Of the 240 questionnaires returned, only 172 bore information which could be recorded in the designated categories. This means that twenty-two percent of the respondents were not able to write down the name of the reading text they used in their classroom (if any), or any other instructional instrument which they used for that purpose. Keeping in mind that these questionnaires were hand carried to the respondents, and in most cases collected and mailed back by the Institute participants (in this sense they were personally involved), a situation in which in excess of one-fifth of the respondents were unable to respond appropriately to something as basic as naming a reading text might indicate a distorted sample. On the other hand, the result may be indicative of the general lack of sophistication of adult education teachers with regard to teaching this basic skill.

As stated previously, part of the purpose of the survey was to determine the most popular commercial materials used in teaching reading in the Adult Education classrooms of respondents in the sample, and another part was to determine the reliability ratings of these materials. While it is probably useful to know what materials are most popular among teachers and program directors, the information by itself would not be very helpful. The knowledge of the worth of the most popular material in use as evaluated by objective analysis, however, is of importance to the Teacher Trainer, particularly in the field of reading.

One might assume that all commercially prepared materials and programs for teaching reading are comparable in quality and appropriateness. This assumption has proved, on the basis of the subjective experiences of many teachers, to be unfounded. Many teachers have tried to use materials for teaching reading which have been rejected by the adult students in the class for various reasons. There are many ways to teach reading, and the materials on the market reflect all known approaches from completely individual methods to new alphabet forms.

The evaluations of Adult Basic Education materials conducted by the Southwestern Cooperative Educational Laboratory, Inc., Albuquerque, New Mexico, under a grant from the Adult Basic Education Division, Office of Education, U. S. Department of Health, Education & Welfare (OEG-2-7-005081-5081) were used as the basis for rating the materials mentioned by the teachers in this survey.

Under this system, each commercially available set of reading materials was rated according to eight factors on a five point scale from "outstanding" to "inadequate". The points upon which all materials were rated were:

1. Objectives 2. Criterion Measures 3. Instructional Components 4. Learner Pre-requisite 5. Teacher Requirement 6. Reliability Effect 7. Cost 8. Time*

* More information on this project is available from Southwestern Cooperative Educational Laboratory, Inc., 117 Richmond Drive, N.E., Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106

It is helpful to note that virtually all identifiable materials mentioned on the questionnaires by teachers had been rated in the aforementioned project.

The analysis which follows is divided into two parts: word recognition instructional materials and comprehension instructional materials.

Word Recognition:

MATERIAL		OVERALL RATING (S.C.E.L.)	PERCENT MENTIONED BY
Publisher	TITLE		
Steck-Vaughn	Working with Word Patterns	Average	19%
Mott	Basic Language Skills Program	Average	17%
Science Research Assn.	Reading Laboratories	Above Average	17%
Steck-Vaughn	I Want to Read and Write	Average	11%
Follett	System for Success	Outstanding	9%
McGraw Hill	Programmed Reading for Adults	Average	9%
Steck-Vaughn	Adult Reader	Average	9%
Follett	Reading for a Purpose	Above Average	6%
Steck-Vaughn	Working with Words	Average	5%
Steck-Vaughn	Building Word Power	Average	5%
Sullivan Assoc.	Sullivan Reading Series	Above Average	4%
Steck Vaughn	English Essentials	Fair	3%

Forty-four titles were mentioned by respondents in the "word recognition" category. Most of the material included by the teachers is considered "above average" in reliability (26 titles) or "average" (15 titles). Only two of the titles included were rated "fair"; four were "outstanding". As mentioned, the rating considers whether the material is adequate for the level intended, whether it fulfills its purpose, and whether language and content are at an adult level.

However, while the average reliability rating for all materials listed was high, the average rating for material most commonly used was lower. The total lists contained nearly twice as many "above average" as "average" titles, but 7 of the 12 most often used materials were rated "average" with one "fair". Only three were "above average" and one "outstanding".

Comprehension:

Publisher	M A T E R I A L	OVERALL RATING (S.C.E.L.)	PERCENT MENTIONED BY
Science Research Assn.	Reading Laboratory	Above Average	23%
Science Research Assn.	Reading for Understanding	Above Average	16%
Mott	Language Series	Average	12.5%
Reader's Digest	Skill Builders	Outstanding	12.0%
Steck-Vaughn	Adult Reader	Average	6.5%
Steck-Vaughn	Activities for Reading Improvement	Average	2.7%
McGraw-Hill	Programmed Reading for Adults	Average	2.7%
Follett	Reading for a Viewpoint	Above Average	2.2%
Steck-Vaughn	Working with Word Patterns	Average	2.2%
Prentice-Hall	Be a Better Reader	Above Average	2.2%
Regents	English Step-by-Step with Pictures	Average	2.2%
Follett	Systems for Success	Outstanding	2.2%

The above list of published materials represents those most frequently mentioned by respondents for teaching reading comprehension. Materials used by the teachers rated generally high on the evaluation scale. Of the total mentioned, six were rated "outstanding", 21 "above average", 18 "average", one

"fair", and one "inadequate". The level of the most popular material, as shown above, again was slightly lower than the overall ratings of the list taken as a whole.

Six of the twelve most popular materials used to teach word recognition were also used by teachers in teaching comprehension. Four of these - Mott Language Series, Mc Graw-Hill's Programmed Reading for Adults, Steck-Vaughn's Adult Reader and Working with Word Patterns - were rated "Average" on the reliability scale; the other two titles were Follett's Systems for Success (outstanding) and the Science Research Assn. Reading Laboratory (above average).

Part of the analysis of responses on the questionnaires had to do with determining the "goodness of fit" of the reading levels being taught by the teachers and the levels of the materials they reported using. Sixteen specific violations of the levels in use of instructional materials reported were noted in this analysis. In eight cases, the instructional material listed was too high for the level of student being taught and in five cases the level of the material reported was too low. Twelve of the instances noted involved the misuse of materials published by the Steck-Vaughn Company.

Overall, however, most of the responses indicated that the levels of materials being taught to students from published materials fell close to their achievement levels as reported on the questionnaire.

Reliability by Level of COMMERCIAL READING Material Reported

LEVEL	RATING					
	1 OUTSTANDING	2 ABOVE AVG.	3 AVERAGE	4 BELOW AVG.	5 INADEQUATE	
1	2 Titles	12 Titles	6 Titles	0	0	20
2	3 Titles	20 Titles	14 Titles	3 Titles		40
3	5 Titles	14 Titles	8 Titles	One Title	One Title	29
4	One Title	3 Title	2 Title	0	0	6
TOTAL	11	49	30	4	1	96

It can be seen from the table above that 60 titles or 63% of the total number of titles mentioned were "outstanding" or "above average"; while 37% (35 titles) were average or below. Noteworthy, also, is the heavy concentration of material reported at levels 2 and 3 (72%). This would indicate that, for purposes of teaching reading, there appears to be a dearth of materials on the level one and four.

It was possible to determine from the titles of published materials mentioned by the respondents those which were designed primarily for elementary pupils' reading instruction. While the levels of some of these materials are not inappropriate for the purpose of teaching basic reading skills to adults, often the format of this material is rejected by the adult student because it is perceived as being "for kids" or "childish", such as Classroom Reading Clinic by Webster, Words in Color by Leanns and Phonics We Use by Lyons.

A total of twenty-two (22) instructional programs of this kind were being used by eighty-four (84) teachers. The use of non-adult commercial materials for teaching reading skills represents a rather significant trend in this survey.

Materials - Teacher-Made

A total of fifty-seven (57) different teacher-made materials were listed by respondents as items used for instructional purposes in reading. A partial list is included to give the reader an idea of the type of material being used and the skill being taught with the material. The total list reflects a considerable amount of creativity on the part of the teacher.

FREQUENCY	TYPE	SKILL
19	Flash Cards (words and letters)	Word recog., phonics, vocab, word attack, syllabication
11	Experience stories	Word recog., comp., vocab., spelling, sentence structure, encoding-decoding, word usage, dictionary usage
11	Picture cards and worksheets and charts	Word recog., comp., phonics, vocab, discussion, s. structure
10	Word lists and cards	Word recog., comp., vocab, phonics, syllabication, spelling
8	Mimeographed or dittoed lessons and exercises	All skills
8	Tapes and records (some of stories in readers)	Listening skill, word recog., ESL, spelling, pronounciation
7	Transparencies	Word recog, comp., vocab., spelling, syll., pronounciation
5	Reading charts-words	Word recog., comp., phonics, syllabication
4	Worksheets	Phonics, grammar, vocab., sentence structure
3	Phonics charts, worksheets, lists	Phonics, syllabication

USE OF COMMERCIALLY PUBLISHED vs. TEACHER-MADE MATERIAL

Analysis of responses concerning the percentage of time during which teachers use commercially published reading materials vs. their own materials during reading instruction shows that fifty-eight percent (101 of 172 respondents) of the teachers use commercial materials to teach reading between 75 and 100% of the time.

Twenty-nine percent use such material between 50% and 74% of the time. The remaining 13% of this sample of respondents reported using commercially prepared materials for teaching reading less than 50% of the instructional time. Thus it can be inferred that most teachers do, in fact, follow the programs of some type of published instructional system as a guide to improving the reading skills of their adult students.

Reasons Teachers Believe Adults Should Learn to Read

Another aspect of this study was to determine some of the reasons why the teachers believed reading was important for their adult students to learn.

Three reasons were given by the investigators. These were to be ranked by the respondents. Below are the results of the rankings for each reason given:

Reason	Ranking Importance				
	FIRST	SECOND	THIRD	FOURTH	TOTAL
Increase enjoyment of leisure time	2%	14%	74%	10%	100
Increase job opportunity	36%	52%	10%	2%	100
Increase Personal Knowledge	38%	28%	11%	3%	100

Percentage rankings within each reason category were handled individually. It can be seen from the above that teachers' belief in the importance of reading for their students centered about the "practical" and "vocational" aspects of the use of reading. Clearly, reading for pleasure or to enhance leisure time was not perceived by teachers as the most important use of this skill which could be made by adult students. Below are listed other reasons as recorded in the "open" end of this question:

Increase identification w/others in community

Increase self image - personal satisfaction

Increase opportunity for social status

Better parents and citizens - assist children

Widen horizons, thinking, understanding

Read other printed material (newspapers, etc.)

Function effectively in society, consumer protection

Aid and influence others

Prepare for rewarding retirement

Stay out of prison (better citizens!)

BOOKS EVERY ADULT SHOULD READ

An attempt was made to determine from the responses of teachers what types of literature they would advocate with regard to their adult students' outside reading. Results indicate that, based on the number of usable responses to other questions, far fewer responses were obtained in this category than might have been expected. Forty-five percent of the teachers who gave usable responses

on other portions of the questionnaire did not answer (that is give book titles). Forty percent of the teachers who gave usable responses on other portions of the questionnaire gave responses which were, for one or many reasons, not appropriate for this question. The majority of the "not appropriate" responses in this catagory were not counted because they mentioned titles of instructional materials rather than titles of library books. Fifty-seven book titles of the type deemed appropriate for this question were obtained. Twenty-four were classified non-fiction and 26 were classified fiction; seven titles were either unclassified or unknown. Forty-one of the books could be classified as "popular" titles, having more to do with "recency" as a quality they share; sixteen could be classified as "inspirational", in that they deal with life stories of persons who have overcome adversity to achieve fame. Six titles could be categorized as having to do with philosophy of living and conditions of life in today's environment.

Discussion and Conclusions

1. Results of this survey must be interpreted in light of the rather severe limitations imposed by the inadequacy of the sample size and by the sampling method used. The number of respondents (240) cannot be considered entirely representative of the ABE teacher population, mainly because it was not possible to draw a random sample. About the best that can be said for the results is that they probably represent a rough and impressionistic cross-section of the country's ABE teacher population in so far as the materials used in the handling of the day-to-day process of the teaching is concerned. One of the great needs in the

field is the development of a means for contacting teachers on a state, regional and nationwide basis for research of this type.

2. The fact that 22% of the questionnaires received contained responses which could not be used in reporting results suggests rather strongly that there is considerable ignorance among the ranks of ABE teachers about methods and materials used in teaching basic reading skills. This would appear to lend support for the continuing effort on the part of responsible agencies for the conduct of in-service training for ABE teachers in the teaching of reading.

3. Observation of the array of commercial and non-commercial materials reported as being used in the teaching of reading to adult students leads one to the hypothesis that the field is not dominated by one or a combination of systems or strategies for teaching reading. This is in contrast to, for example, one situation in teaching reading in public elementary schools. Surveys by the U. S. Office of Education have shown in this regard that over 90% of the teachers in elementary schools use one of the eight major basal reader systems for teaching reading. There is no suggestion in this study that any single publisher of materials or any particular material type used for adult basic reading has control of even a significant minor proportion of the total market. This, in turn, suggests several hypotheses. One is that since there is such diversity in the use of published material in the adult basic education classroom for reading instruction, there is also considerable diversity in teaching practices; and therefore, in the outcomes of such instruction. Second, since it appears that so many teachers are "doing their own thing" with reference to the

use of published materials for teaching reading, it follows that possibly there exists a lack of continuity in teaching basic reading skills from one teacher to another within the same ABE program. There is the further suggestion that some of the adult students are receiving instruction from reading materials which are either too easy or too difficult for the level at which they are reported to be functioning in this regard. These factors, namely the percentage of unusable responses, the diversity of material types and the discrepancies between level taught and appropriateness of materials, leads one to suspect that the quality of reading instruction may be somewhat lower than the optimum.

4. Analysis of the responses obtained in this survey enables the investigators not only to determine the most popular commercially prepared materials for teaching reading, but also to observe which commercially available materials of high quality were not reported by the teachers. There were sixteen (16) instructional programs rated "OUTSTANDING" in the Southwestern Cooperative Educational Laboratory project, but not mentioned by any of the teachers in this survey.

It is probable that these highly rated instructional reading materials and programs are not used because teachers do not know about them. Again it is emphasized that comprehensive lists of the names of teachers who teach adults should be compiled so that publishers and bookmen could make these teachers aware of what is available commercially for this purpose. It is also suggested that publishers and bookmen need to devote more time and effort toward reaching the ABE materials market.

At various times publishers of educational materials have questioned whether the adult basic education market was really large enough to justify the necessary expenditures to market such materials. Evidence in this survey indicates that, with reference to reading, 87% of the teachers use commercially prepared materials for instruction practically all the time. In 1971, under the sponsorship of U.S.O.E., there were approximately 625,000 adults enrolled in ABE classes. These two facts alone should be enough to make the point that there is indeed a viable and rapidly expanding market for these materials. Hopefully the days of materials-starved ABE classrooms will soon be over.

5. There is the suggestion based on the results of this survey that ABE teachers may not be doing a satisfactory job of motivating their adult students to read widely.

Authorities in the field of reading have long known that merely teaching the basic decoding and comprehension skills to learners of any age does not produce readers who are mature in their use of this skill. A mature reader is one who uses reading in every phase of his daily life; as a recreational vehicle capable of enriching his life vicariously through travel and adventure beyond anything money could buy; as a tool for achieving his vocational and avocational goals; as a means of informing himself so he can better exercise his citizenship responsibilities in the Jeffersonian tradition; in short as a means of participating fully as a citizen in the communications of our highly symbolic, fast-paced, techno-culture.

The teaching of the basic reading skills to individuals without the application of those skills to something worthwhile probably serves to raise them from

simple illiteracy to what Frances Chase calls "higher illiteracy"; those individuals who can read but who cannot or will not interact with the ideas imbedded in print, or those who cannot escape from their own narrow, pre-conceived notions of "The nature of things". These individuals cannot, it seems, do anything more (with their new literacy) about the fundamental problems of human interaction which are critical in our time than they could as total illiterates.

It is in this context that the results of the teachers' responses about why their adult students should learn to read (reasons), and recommendations as to what they should read are deemed important.

The relationship between "learning to read" or "knowing how to read" and "increasing job opportunities" is probably erroneously high in the minds of many teachers. Knowing how to read probably helps a person once he has a job; there is little evidence that learning how to read will enable him to get one. Another observation concerning teachers; perceptions about their adult students' reading has to do with the relatively low rating given to reading as a leisure time activity. Seventy-four percent rated it third in importance. The fact is that leisure time reading is probably the cheapest entertainment an adult can obtain. Virtually every city, town and village has a public library, and the privilege to use it is free. This is a bargain that most adult students should be shown how to use and encouraged to use.

Studies have shown, however, that teachers as a group are themselves not very enthusiastic readers. (Waples')[1] There is a strong suggestion in this survey that adult education teachers are not different as a group. Eighty-four

percent of the teachers did not respond appropriately to the request for titles of books they would suggest for their students to read. This reluctance might be interpreted as a negative outcome when it is widely believed that the best influence for motivating students to read is a teacher who is an avid reader, one who loves books.

1. Douglas Waples and A. M. W. Birkeland, "Reading Interests of Teachers", Washington Government Printing, 1935.

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